

To: Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners
From: Professor Adrian Davis
Date: 8th August 2022
Subject: Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.57: Children and young people's views on local travel - constraints on mode choice

Top line: Children and young people's views are often absent when adults are designing and redesigning transport systems. Yet they have rights and often strong desires to travel sustainably as well as constructive views as to developing sustainable travel solutions.

There has been a considerable amount of discussion in the past two decades about social exclusion in transport. Children and young people have been one of the excluded groups within the general area of transport planning almost since it first developed. Beyond an ethical view in the value of engaging with children and young people, including the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is the importance of participation in democratic processes. Children and young people need to feel that they are included citizens with a voice and that their participation is valued and is seen as necessary for healthy democracies. Plus, children need to be considered within the Just Transition to a low carbon economy in tackling climate change.

The peer reviewed and grey literature is littered with accounts as to the need for engagement with, and participation of, children and young people across a range of public policy areas. In the arena of road transport, when their views are voiced they often have much to offer in terms of ideas for change. They can be shrewd observers of their local streets, have ideas for improving the local environment and the capacity to understand that certain constraints and barriers are difficult to remove. Such evidence has been growing over decades.^{1, 2}

In a study of children aged between 10-13 in Flanders, asking about travel mode preferences, walking and cycling were preferred transport modes.³ Items that contributed to the attractiveness of these modes were the social aspects, including health and environmental aspects, perceptions and experiences en route. For both cycling and walking, these experiences formed the principal part of the remarks, with a wide range of experiences to write about. "You can enjoy nature", "Walking is fun because you can smell nature", "The crunching of little stones". On the other hand, some children indicated being responsible: "I feel tall when I'm walking alone", "I can do what I want when I'm alone", "I like it when my mum trusts me".

Half of the children indicated that they would like to go to school in a different way, preferably by bike. The reasons for the non-use were traffic and social safety as the most important reasons for using another travel mode, followed by the home to school distance. However, it is unclear to what extent it is their own opinion, as they state: "My mum finds the distance too long and too dangerous", "My mum is afraid that something might happen", "My mum is too worried". Mothers are mentioned more than fathers or parents as an 'influencing factor', indicating that mothers have a greater protective and decisive influence on the child's mode choice than fathers.

¹ Davis, A. Jones, L. 1997 Whose neighbourhood? Whose quality of life? Developing a new agenda for children's health in urban settings, *Health Education Journal*, 56, 350-363.

² London Health Commission, 2003 Involving children and young people in Transport Planning.

³ Zwerts, E. et al 2010 How children view their travel behaviour: a case study from Flanders (Belgium), *Journal of Transport Geography*, 18: 702-710.